On Baptism: The Baptism of Our Lord

By

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Michael W. Holland, Founding Bishop
Of the Anglican Church International

Summary generated by AI

This document is a sermon titled "On Baptism: The Baptism of Our Lord," delivered by The Rt. Rev. Dr. Michael W. Holland, Founding Bishop of the Anglican Church International. The sermon focuses on the Christian season of Epiphany, exploring the revelation of Jesus Christ as God incarnate, and the manifestation of Christ in believers' lives today. It emphasizes the theological significance of baptism as the means by which Christians are cleansed, empowered, and called to live in communion with God and each other through the Holy Spirit .

The Meaning of Epiphany and Knowing Christ

The sermon begins by explaining that "Epiphany" means "revelation" or "manifestation," celebrating Jesus as the Word made flesh and God manifest in the world. It calls believers to recognize God's gift in Christ historically and in their lives presently. The sermon addresses how one can know Jesus as Christ through Scripture, tradition, the Church, creation, and personal experience. The baptism of Jesus is highlighted as a key manifestation of His divine identity, marked by the Spirit descending like a dove and God's voice affirming Jesus as His beloved Son .

Scripture, particularly apostolic testimony, is a primary source for recognizing Christ, as seen in Saint Peter's witness to Jesus' death, resurrection, and role as judge, along with the forgiveness of sins through belief in Him. The universal Church, described as "one Holy Catholic and apostolic church," offers believers a communal way to experience Christ through worship and fellowship. Additionally, God's presence is perceived in all creation, as noted by Saint Augustine's reflection on the Trinity in creation, and in human relationships as part of God's creation .

Baptism and the Christian Life

Baptism is presented as a sacrament that cleanses sins, empowers believers with the Holy Spirit, and reorients them toward God. The sermon stresses that Christ enlightens believers to live in truth and fellowship with God, but this requires active participation. The famous Augustine quote, "We without God cannot; God without us will not," underscores the cooperative nature of salvation. Through baptismal vows, Christians commit to proclaiming the Good News, loving neighbors, seeking justice, and respecting human dignity, thereby manifesting Christ's light in the world .

The sermon further explains that baptism enables believers to die to sin and be born anew to live for others and God. This transformation is realized through acts of love, service, and sharing, such as the breaking of bread, which symbolizes both physical and spiritual nourishment. Temptations to turn away from God are acknowledged, but the Good News is that repentance and return to God restore life

in Christ. The gift of God's grace and the Holy Spirit received at baptism empower believers to fulfill their covenant and live in unity and love .

Living Out the Baptismal Covenant

The sermon emphasizes that loving one another is the essence of Christian life and a reflection of Christ's love. This love is expressed through community, care, service, and mutual support, both within the church and in everyday life. Such living demonstrates the abiding presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit, creating unity among believers. The sermon encourages seeing Christ manifested in daily interactions and challenges believers to live as one body in Christ, continuallyrenewing their baptismal commitment .

Practical Example and Closing Prayer

An example from Alcoholics Anonymous is cited to illustrate the joy and fulfillment found in selfless service to others, highlighting the spiritual fellowship and transformation that occurs when individuals abandon themselves to God and serve their neighbors. The sermon concludes with a prayer asking God to help those baptized keep their covenant and boldly confess Jesus as Lord and Savior .

***Blessings and peace** are extended to all from The Rt. Rev. Dr. Michael W. Holland, with contact information provided for Saint Clare's Anglican Chapel and the Anglican Church International .*

On Baptism: The Baptism of Our Lord

]"Epiphany" is Greek for "revelation, showing forth, manifestation." It is a season of celebrating the showing forth of the saving nature of God in, Jesus' status as not just another prophet, but God manifest, the Word made flesh, Christ. As Christmas calls us to return in kind to God ourselves as He gives Himself to us, Epiphany calls us to recognize God's gift of Himself in Christ in the past and in our lives today, God manifest in our lives today. It is to how or ways we can do this that today I would like to speak. Two issues come to mind – that Jesus is Christ, (i.e., God Incarnate), and Christ manifest in our lives today. How, in what ways, then, can we see Jesus is Christ and recognize Christ at work in our lives today?

- One way to know Jesus is Christ is through the Scripture. In fact, the readings for the next few weeks during the season of Epiphany have to do with instances where Jesus being Christ is made manifest, hence, Epiphany. In our Gospel reading for today we have the baptism of our Lord and Savior where the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."
- And the Scripture just is testimony handed down through generations – the verbal proclamation of the Word through Apostolic succession. In the Epistle reading for today we have Saint Peter saying:

> "We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets

testify about him that *everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name*."

- "We believe in one Holy Catholic (universal) and apostolic church." So we also can come to know Jesus is Christ through the tradition and liturgy of the Church. But the universal Church – the Body of Christ in the world today – just is **us**. So we can come to know Christ in our lives today through others and participation in the one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. We can come to know Jesus is Christ and Christ at work in our lives today through interaction with others and worshiping together through the liturgy.
- And, we can come to know God in Christ in an even a broader context. I have heard it said that the artist is in his work, creator in His creation. We can come to know God, then, through all His creation. Notably, Saint Augustine said he could see the Trinity in all of God's creation – roughly, God the Father (Being), God the Son (divine wisdom, in creation form and order) and God the Holy Spirit (something like vitality)
- Further, we are part of His creation and so we can come to know Jesus is Christ and Christ in our lives today through ourselves and each other as part of His creation.
- And we come to know God in Christ though our participation in the sacraments. Notably, today we will be renewing our baptismal vows, participate in the sacrament of baptism.

Christ is our teacher. He enlightens us to the Truth – which He is – of how to live in communion with God – in His fellowship, the fellowship of His Spirit - which is the Way, (i.e., not in sin which is separation from God) – and thus makes possible taking away the sins of the world and our reconciliation with God, here and now. But He does not do this without our participation. St. Augustine was noted for saying, "We without God cannot; God without us will not." It is through us, then, at least in part, He does this. For when we are open to Him – the Truth – and act in accordance with it – follow the Way – His light shines forth through us in our acts. And when others do this and we are open to it we see it – the Light – reflected back on us and are able to see His divinity in our lives. That light – Christ – surrounds us every day. We need only open our eyes and see. Epiphany! When I ask, or you ask, or anyone asks "How are you?" and means it, then it shines forth through us and thus, through us, He is our sure foundation. We are thus, in carrying out our baptismal vows – "proclaiming by word and example the Good News of God in Christ," "seeking and serving Christ in all persons, loving our neighbors as we love ourselves," "striving for justice and peace among all people, and respecting the dignity of every human being" - bound together as one church in Christ our sure foundation, one manifestation, one showing forth of the Light of Christ in the world. Epiphany!

And it is in baptism that we are empowered to do this. Through baptism we are cleansed, empowered, and forgiven our sins. We are cleansed of our sins and empowered with the Holy Spirit to see and live in accordance with the Truth which is Christ by faith. We are reoriented towards God in perception and act. The challenge is in the perceiving and the acting – **seeing that we are to act for the common good each according to their need so that no one need be left wanting**. If we are present when this occurs Christ is in our face so to speak; His light shines on us and the Way we are to go. We need only open our eyes. *Epiphany!*

And nowhere can we see it more clearly than in the breaking of the bread. **Share our food so that no one need be wanting and we feed our souls**. Both occur in the breaking of the bread and Christ is through us in our face so to speak. When we share our food we live in accordance with the Truth by

carrying out our baptismal covenant, and, in so sharing, in so living into our baptism, we are **born anew**. What is **made possible in Baptism is fulfilled in act by faith in Christ.** For we have in act died to sin and been born to the Truth, died to what is fleeting and born to eternal life in Christ.

Often, however, we face temptation to turn away from our orientation to God and live for ourselves and not Him. We are tempted and turn away from God in ourselves, each other, and the world. The Good News proclaimed by Jesus is that we need only turn back to God in Christ – or as we proclaim in our baptismal covenant that "whenever you/we fall into sin, [we will] repent and return to the Lord" - and we will find life in Him. For, as Christ died to sin the one full and perfect and sufficient sacrifice and rose again conquering and overcoming death and lives to God, so we in Baptism die to sin and rise and are alive to God in Christ, die to serving, living to ourselves – division/turning away from each other and thus God - and are born anew into the Body of Christ to serving, living to others – thus living to God - by means of His Holy Spirit here and now and hereafter. And, at baptism, we are given the gift of God's Grace, His Holy Spirit of unconditional love. With that gift, empowered by that gift, we are able to turn back to God in each other and follow Christ. We are able to fulfill our baptismal covenant – "proclaiming by word and example the Good News of God in Christ," "seeking and serving Christ in all persons, loving our neighbors as we love ourselves," "striving for justice and peace among all people, and respecting the dignity of every human being" - by loving each other as we are loved by Him, by dying to love of self and being born to love of others, a love out of which naturally flows our giving our lives – our living, our Being - to each other.

To love one another is to give our being, our living, to one another. It is my preparing this sermon, it is your coming to church, to communion with each other, it is helping those in need, to care, to listen, to just be with, it is to make our lives one of service to others. And in caring for each other we come to know Christ, we come to know Christ in the Spirit, His Holy Spirit He leaves us as we abide in its Fellowship, the Unity/ Fellowship of His Holy Spirit. We come to know that through Him abiding in us, we love each other, help each other, and that through each of us carrying out our baptismal covenant, He provides for us, our sure foundation. We come to know that He abides in us, and we in acting abide in Him. When we thus live in communion with one another each with our common ultimate goal being, to love each other as He loves us, we experience His love through each other and are one in Him, one in Christ. ***Epiphany!***

When we love each other as Christ loves us we love Christ as He loves us. And when we love Christ as He loves us we know Christ in the Spirit He left us, and are enlightened to our dwelling in Christ and He in us. ***Epiphany!!***

All this happens in our everyday interaction with each other, not just at church. It happens at work, with friends, when we meet people on the street. It happens in our being toward each other, our being for each other, our being one in Christ. When at baptism we die to self and are born to others, we are born to new life in Christ, a life defined by our love for each other, our giving of our being, our living, our lives, ourselves to each other, and so to Christ out of love for Him. We thus live in Him and He in us. And in so living we come to know Christ manifest in our everydayness! ***Epiphany!!!***

I have found an example of this in a program of which I am a part. It is AA. In the "Big Book" of Alcoholics Anonymous in the chapter entitled "A Vision for You:"

> *"These men had found something brand new in life. Though they knew they must help other alcoholics if they would remain sober, that motive became*

secondary. It was transcended by the happiness they found in giving themselves for others. They shared their homes, their slender resources, and gladly devoted their spare hours to fellow-sufferers. They were willing, by day or night, to place a new man in the hospital and visit him afterward. They grew in numbers."

"Our book is meant to be suggestive only. We realize we know only a little. God will constantly disclose more to you and to us. Ask Him in your morning meditation what you can do each day for the man who is still sick. The answers will come, if your own house is in order. But obviously you cannot transmit something you haven't got. See to it that your relationship with Him is right, and great events will come to pass for you and countless others. This is the Great Fact for us.

Abandon yourself to God as you understand God. Admit your faults to Him and to your fellows. Clear away the wreckage of your past. Give freely of what you find and join us. We shall be with you in the Fellowship of the Spirit, and you will surely meet some of us as you trudge the Road of Happy Destiny."

Let us pray.

Father in heaven, who at the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan proclaimed him your beloved Son and anointed him with the Holy Spirit: Grant that all who are baptized into his Name may keep the covenant they have made, and boldly confess him as Lord and Savior; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. *Amen.*

BLESSINGS and PEACE to ALL!!!
+MWH

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Michael W. Holland, Founding Bishop
Saint Clare's Anglican Chapel
The Anglican Church International
79 Colt Square, Suite 2
Fayetteville, AR 72703
479-409-6915
anglican@uark.edu